

Portable Channel Chronology
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Directors: Bonnie Klein, Sanford (Sandy) Rockowitz, John Camelio, Robert Shea and Tim Kelly.

1971

In 1971 the Media Equipment Pool was funded by the New York State Council through an award to the Rochester Museum and Science Center. The ½" portable equipment was to be used by local artists and community organizations. The program began in July 1971. In the first 6 months of operation equipment was loaned to more than 50 organizations and individuals "for projects ranging from personal feedback experiences to political and cultural documentaries. We have been involved with projects involving the school's crisis, police education, the Women's movement, migrant farm workers, educational experiments and Attica."

– letter to Ralph Hocking, 10/14/71 from Bonnie Klein, Coordinator of the Media Equipment Pool.

There was a charge for rental of the equipment both to individuals and organizations; a production crew was also available for a fee.

Tape Log #1, Fall 1971, lists many videotapes including documentation of the Videofreex, community organizations, cable TV hearings, Attica and prison reform.

Staff: Bonnie Klein, Gail Lyndon, David Christoff, Josh Kardon, Larry Gale, Sandy Rockowitz, Mike Brisson

1972

By Spring 1972, Portable Channel had incorporated and separated from the Rochester Museum and Science Center. Portable Channel maintained the Equipment Pool, and was developing a proposal for training courses for community programming and cable. They announced Feedback:Feedforward, would be a regularly published newsletter. A 30 min. sampler tape was available for a tape exchange.

-March 9, 1972 flyer

Tapes listed in Dumpling Ground, including the Attica and Prison series. Technical modifications by Sandy Rockowitz published in Dumping Ground vol.2. Larry Gale listed interest in collecting Kid=s Tapes, made by children 4-16 years; would exchange for dubs.

Operating an equipment pool which services artists, photographers, students, community groups, it trains people in the use and potentialities of the equipment. Is currently presenting a series of tapes on the public access channels in NY - both on Teleprompter and Sterling Manhattan. Its data bank of 1/2" tapes is impressive and they can be written to for a copy of their tape log. Its range of materials is broad and extensive: It covers entertainment and music, local culture, education, politics and social action (farm workers' meeting, Shirley Chisholm in Rochester, 3 Attica Inmates, Thomas Merton...Women, Health, Video, Cable and the Medium."

- Radical Software V 2, N1.

1974

Portable Channel's commitment to community access, characterized by Sandy Rockowitz, was to "television as a medium for social dialogue and artistic expression, with production by and not simply for the people in the community".

-Whitney Museum of Art Video Conference.

1975

Portable Channel provided access to ½" production equipment, technical and production assistance. Staff – Sandy Rockowitz and Judy DeSisti

1977

- Equipment Pool - access to b&w portable production and editing equipment. Access generally was free to artists who submitted proposals, and at reduced rates for non-profit organizations. Two editing systems, one color, were available.
- Education - workshops were offered regularly throughout the year.
- Feedback/Feedforward - a quarterly newsletter for the regional constituency.
- Library - 300 community-produced videotapes
- Production Services – technical consultations and production services to organizations
- Screenings - monthly exhibitions and in cooperation with the Memorial Art Gallery
- Homemade TV - since 1972 Portable Channel produced this series in conjunction with WXXI, PBS affiliate in Rochester. Portable Channel produced programming, often documentary in nature, for broadcast.
- Cable TV - programs in development to facilitate the development of non-commercial uses of cable television
- Distribution – Portable Channel offered a Video Catalog offering 28 tapes from the series Homemade TV. Examples include
 - Portable Channel Meets Senior Citizens (1972)
 - Adirondack Park: Planning for the Future (1973)
 - Women on Women (1973), Acable Report (1973)
 - Genesee Valley (1973)
 - Self Help Productions – a black media group (1973)
 - Summer Fun – with Morton Subotnick (1973)
 - Lord Mr Ford – with Elon Soltes (1974)
 - The Electronic Image – with the Vasulkas (1974)
 - Rape (1974)
 - Astral Projections (1975)
 - Vasulkas Tape (1975)
 - Wanted: Alternatives – physical disabilities and access (1976)
 - Women/Ministers (1976)

• Visiting Artists and Exhibitions – Steven Kolpan, Nancy Rosin, John Rogers of Optic Nerve
John Camelio serves as Director from 1977-1979.

1978

Programs

- Equipment Pool – access to ½" equipment for projects with documentary orientation; free to artists, variable rates for non-profit organizations.
- Workshops – 4 eight week sessions each year
- Exhibition – Windows, a bimonthly screening and Portable Channel Productions – Portable

- Channel produces tapes for PBS broadcast
- Feedback/Feedforward – quarterly newsletter
- Visiting Artists 4 2 week residencies with honorarium
- Collection – 700 community-based tapes
- Distribution – has a catalog of tapes for rental or purchase.
- Homemade TV – a program broadcast on WXXI between 1972-1977, produced by Portable Channel
- Consultation – project planning and management
- Technical Services – production crew and equipment for location projects

During the late 1970s many media centers throughout the State were put under pressure from the New York State Council to increase other sources of income and reduce dependence on Council support for media programs. NYSCA reduced funding to many media centers throughout the State at this time. Portable Channel sustained reductions in the awards from NYSCA; John Camelio, then Director, also believed that NYSCA was turning away from support for community-based production programs and directing more funding toward media art. This was disputed by NYSCA and also by other media centers, many of which had received similar budget reductions. Portable Channel began to search for other ways to earn income to support community-based activities.

1979

Robert Shea became Director. Portable Channel began an initiative to acquire broadcast quality equipment, in an effort to generate additional income through equipment rentals to local and regional producers, and commercial users as well. Portable Channel eventually was able to put this equipment base in place by using its own financial resources, but the population of users was not large enough to generate significant income, and Portable Channel was further diverted from its mission of community access.

1980

“Residents of SoHo-style industrial lofts should feel at home in Portable Channel's renovated warehouse. It was chilly the day of our visit, having just been reopened after Christmas weekend. But the vibes are warm and the energy level high here. PC is busy with a wide variety of programs, mainly serving the Genesee region. The facility includes video editing rooms, workshops, a video archive, and a gallery for closed circuit exhibition. A film equipment access and workshop program is being developed, an audio program begins in April, and a live cable injection point is a possibility.

A rental program provides small-format video equipment, including a new 3-tube camera, and is mainly for local community service-oriented projects. Editing is done on four 1/2" decks plus a new JVC 3/4" system, and film and slide chains; 24-hour access can be arranged. Rental fees vary, with PC members at the low end and commercial producers at the high end of the scale. Familiarity with the equipment must be demonstrated by a test, or a Saturday workshop taken. PC's educational programs involve artists-in-residence, visiting artists and a summer workshop.

To date, by tradition and demand, their production work has been largely documentary. About 40 of their programs have been broadcast over the local PBS affiliate, and PC has maintained good relationships with local commercial stations. Bob Shea wants to increase the organization's emphasis on production, for cable, broadcast, gallery and closed-circuit.” (1)

Fran Platt with Ann Volkes, Gerry Pallor, “Upstate Report part one,” Foundation for Independent Video and Film, New York City, The Independent, March 80, vol. 3, no. 2, pages 11 and 12.

1982

Robert Shea leaves. Ship Battaglia becomes Director.

1984-1985

Director, Tim Kelly

- Production – in collaboration with Action for a Better Community, Portable Channel produced 3 programs on energy costs, broadcast locally
- Production and Post Production Access – a sliding three-tier rate structure for access to ½” and ¾” video production and editing, and 16mm and Super 8mm film production and editing equipment
- Exhibitions – tied to Artist in Residence Program; rental of exhibition equipment to outside organizations
- Collection – 600 videotapes; Rundel Memorial Library has dubs of Homemade TV
- Artist in Residence Program – 2 – 4 artists each year, 1-6 week residencies, honorarium to artist, emphasis on documentary
- Workshops – production and post-production, variable fees and rates

1985-86

Portable Channel lost support from the New York State Council on the Arts in 1986, following a loss of support from the National Endowment for the Arts. Portable Channel ceased operations in the Fall 1987. Reasons cited for the closing were structural and organizational difficulties, which included poor record-keeping; a lack of support from other larger institutions in the region; and an inability to respond quickly enough to NYSCA’s strictly enforced mandate requiring all media organizations to raise substantial outside income.

The local community of media makers met with a NYSCA representative early in 1988 in Rochester to discuss the situation. Visual Studies Workshop accepted the film equipment, temporarily, in order to research the possibility of continuing to provide access to the region. The video collection was also eventually transferred to Visual Studies Workshop.